

The Role of Intercultural Communication in Fostering Organisational Creativity

O Papel da Comunicação Intercultural na Promoção da Criatividade Organizacional

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to explore the impact of intercultural communication (IC) on organisational creativity (OC). Specifically, it analyses its contribution to organisational success, identifies challenges and advantages when integrating intercultural communication, and understands its effects on team creativity.

A qualitative multiple-case study approach was adopted using purposive sampling involving semi-structured interviews with managers from different industries. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring data themes and patterns meticulously. The findings show that IC (1) is a key factor for organisational success communication contributes significantly to the companies' growth and performance, (2) enriches the organisational culture and creativity, and (3) allows organisations to foster a more inclusive workplace and improve work processes. Besides, (4) culturally diverse teams bring real benefits to organisations, (5) employees from diverse cultural backgrounds provide creative suggestions and a greater diversity of ideas, and (6) sensitivity in communication is essential to address potential challenges.

This study offers fresh perspectives on the relationship between intercultural communication (IC) and organizational creativity (OC), exploring a significant yet insufficiently examined topic in organizational research. Using a qualitative multiple-case study method, it demonstrates how IC promotes inclusivity, enhances organizational culture, and stimulates innovation through diverse viewpoints. The research stands out for its detailed analysis of the complexities of IC within team creativity, while also uncovering the benefits and obstacles associated with its integration. Its practical

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value lies in providing organizations with strategies to leverage IC, fostering creativity, optimizing work processes, and supporting growth in culturally diverse environments.

KEYWORDS: Intercultural Communication, Organisational Creativity, Cultural Diversity, Team Dynamics, Innovation.

RESUMO: Este estudo tem como objetivo explorar o impacto da comunicação intercultural (CI) na criatividade organizacional (CO). Especificamente, analisa o seu contributo para o sucesso organizacional, identifica os desafios e as vantagens da integração da comunicação intercultural e compreende os seus efeitos na criatividade das equipas.

Foi adoptada uma abordagem qualitativa de estudo de casos múltiplos, utilizando uma amostragem intencional que envolveu entrevistas semi-estruturadas com gestores de diferentes indústrias. A análise temática foi utilizada para identificar meticulosamente temas e padrões recorrentes nos dados. Os resultados mostram que o CI (1) é um fator-chave para o sucesso organizacional, a comunicação contribui significativamente para o crescimento e o desempenho das empresas, (2) enriquece a cultura e a criatividade organizacionais e (3) permite às organizações promover um local de trabalho mais inclusivo e melhorar os processos de trabalho. Além disso, (4) as equipas culturalmente diversificadas trazem benefícios reais para as organizações, (5) os trabalhadores de origens culturais diversas fornecem sugestões criativas e uma maior diversidade de ideias, e (6) a sensibilidade na comunicação é essencial para enfrentar potenciais desafios.

Este estudo oferece novas perspectivas sobre a relação entre a comunicação intercultural (CI) e a criatividade organizacional (CO), explorando um tópico significativo mas insuficientemente examinado na investigação organizacional. Utilizando um método qualitativo de estudo de casos múltiplos, demonstra como a CI promove a inclusão, melhora a cultura organizacional e estimula a inovação através de diversos pontos de vista. A investigação destaca-se pela análise detalhada das complexidades do CI na criatividade das equipas, ao mesmo tempo que revela os benefícios e obstáculos associados à sua integração. O seu valor prático reside no facto de fornecer às organizações estratégias para alavancar o CI, fomentando a criatividade, otimizando os processos de trabalho e apoiando o crescimento em ambientes culturalmente diversos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Comunicação Intercultural, Criatividade Organizacional, Diversidade Cultural, Dinâmica de Equipas, Inovação.

1. Introduction

Technological advancements, international trade, and talent mobility have led to a more interconnected global economy, requiring organisations to adapt to diverse cultural contexts and dynamic market demands (Liu et al., 2015). In a highly interconnected global environment, organisations must engage in innovation not only to ensure their survival but also to achieve success in a competitive and saturated market (Winarno et al., 2022). Creativity is fundamental to innovation from its inception and throughout the entire process (Amabile et al., 1996), thereby making a significant positive impact on business performance (Ferreira et al., 2020).

As organisations continuously expand globally and the workplace becomes more culturally diverse, fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding of different cultural norms, values and communication styles in the work environment is essential (Shahid, 2022). Ineffective intercultural communication can lead to the loss of partnerships, projects, and business opportunities, as well as damage organisational reputation (Washington et al., 2012).

Since teams comprised of individuals from varied cultural backgrounds offer opportunities for creativity and innovation (Phillips et al., 2015; West, 2002), the ability to communicate effectively across cultures to stimulate creativity and innovation is essential to help organisations prosper in the highly competitive market.

Although the field of IC evolved early, it took years for researchers to develop their frameworks, theories, and studies; the truth is that intercultural communication, the one that is perceived as an interaction between individuals from different national cultures (Bakic-Miric, 2008; Croucher et al., 2015). Besides, this field has long been a subject of study, leading to the development of various frameworks and theories, similar to the field of creativity. Concerning this connection, the existing literature mainly highlights that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds offer opportunities for creativity and innovation. However, there is still a lack of a detailed analysis regarding the relationship between effective intercultural communication and creative capabilities and its influence on organisational creativity (Braslauskas, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to address the existing gap by exploring and analysing the dynamics of IC on OC.

Multicultural companies must understand their diverse workforce and guide effective cross-cultural communication as it influences daily operations (Sahadevan, 2021). Literature suggests that having diverse cultural backgrounds within organisations provides ground for creativity (Stahl et al., 2010), which is essential for businesses (Lombardo et al., 2011). Effective communication and creativity stimulate job performance in a culturally diverse workplace (Aye & Thida, 2019). Despite the recognised importance in studies of both intercultural communication and creativity, there remains a significant absence of complete analysis and empirical evidence examining the precise nature of these two fields on influencing each other in organisational environments (Braslauskas,

2021). This gap in knowledge presents a problem for companies seeking to leverage the full potential of their culturally diverse teams or for companies whose intention is to cultivate creativity but lack the necessary know-how. Without a clear understanding of how to effectively manage intercultural communication to increase creativity, organisations are likely to miss out on opportunities for innovation and fail to succeed. Additionally, the challenges and barriers to effective intercultural in diverse organisational settings are not fully addressed, leaving firms without adequate guidance. Therefore, the following research propositions (P) have been framed.

Diverse cultural perspectives and communication styles contribute to or detract from creative outcomes (e.g., Jones et al., 2020; Lombardo et al., 2011) and there is a need to comprehend the broader and more holistic impact of intercultural communication on organisational success (e.g., Braslauskas, 2021; Aye & Thida, 2019; Zeng et al, 2011). Thus, we intend to test:

P1. How does intercultural communication contribute to the success of an organisation?

What are the main key advantages and obstacles encountered by organisations when promoting intercultural communication for creativity? Understanding these components can offer valuable insights to corporations looking to enhance creativity and intercultural communication (Chen et al., 2017; Phillips et al., 2015). Therefore, the following proposition is tested:

P2. What are the primary benefits and challenges organisations face when integrating intercultural communication in the company?

There is a double nature of intercultural communication in the context of team dynamics and there are some positive aspects to it, such as how diverse perspectives can lead to more creative problem-solving, and negative aspects, such as potential misunderstandings or conflicts that can impede creativity (Crisp et al., 2012). Accordingly, the following proposition is proposed:

P3. In what ways can intercultural communication facilitate or hinder the creative process in teams?

It focuses on the methods and practices companies use to evaluate and improve their efforts towards intercultural communication and creativity. It explores the tools, techniques, and best practices that are implemented to ensure that communication across different cultures is effective (Kaplan, 1960; Shadid, 2022). Thus:

P4. What strategies do organisations employ to assess and enhance intercultural communication and creativity?

2. Theoretical background

Before understanding the relationship between intercultural communication and organisational creativity, it is necessary to consider cultural diversity's importance and its relationship with creativity. Creativity is crucial in organisations (Lombardo et al., 2011) and recent data indicates

that creativity can be increased through social diversity (Crisp et al., 2011). Teams comprised of individuals from varied cultural backgrounds offer opportunities for creativity and innovation by enabling the integration of varied perceptions, wisdom, skills, and capabilities (Phillips et al., 2015; West, 2002). Having this diversity discourages groups from reaching premature consensus on complex matters (Knippenberg et al., 2004). On the other hand, culture generally refers to the shared values, beliefs, behaviours, and systems of meaning that are unique among a group of people, it functions as a guide for their understanding of various aspects of life and the world around them and encompasses the way of living of a particular society (Earley et al., 2000).

The vast significance of team cultural diversity for the advancement of science, technology, and innovation has been recognised by different scholars and institutions (Jones et al., 2020; National Research Council, 2015). Interacting with diversity is highly likely to result in improved creative performance in organisations (Crisp et al., 2012). The mechanisms that connect diversity and increased creativity are highly likely correlated to the distinctions in experiences, thought patterns, ways of seeing the world, information processing, and problem-solving approaches that individuals from different cultures usually possess (Mannix et al., 2005; Stevens et al., 2008).

However, cultural diversity is unlikely to enhance the generation of creative ideas in individuals who have a close mind for new experiences (Leung et al., 2008), and maintain hostile attitudes toward diversity (Homan et al., 2007). When individuals from different backgrounds feel uncomfortable during communication, it creates barriers among team members and it can lead to feelings of anger and resentment (Chen et al., 2017). That is when a bridge between effective intercultural communication and creativity should be built by the organisation, especially in the beginning; motivating employees to embrace change and cultivate creativity in intercultural business communication (Braslauskas, 2021).

It must be acknowledged that for companies to offer creative solutions to the changing needs of society, the organisations' members must initially establish effective communication among themselves and apply creativity to address intercultural communication challenges, thereby enabling them to subsequently tackle the world's issues (Braslauskas, 2021). Therefore, it can be said that creativity ought to be used before, during, and after intercultural communication – enhancing understanding, problem-solving during communication, and innovation stemming from the effectiveness of intercultural communication within cultural diversity (Dumitraşcu-Băldău et al., 2019).

Stahl et al. (2010) indicated that cultural diversity in teams was connected to decreased social integration and task conflict, resulting in process losses, it also led to significant process gains through enhanced creativity and satisfaction. Effective communication and creativity stimulate job performance in a culturally diverse workplace, and it can be stated that enhancing communication

effectiveness is imperative to increasing workers' performance and fostering creativity within diverse teams (Aye & Thida, 2019).

Therefore, analysing both empirical research it can be suggested that while communication among individuals with cultural diversity might present challenges, it also offers opportunities for higher creativity, especially when combined with effective communication strategies to increase social integration and reduce conflict. By delving into the deep-level aspects of culture (e.g., values and behaviours) rather than the surface-level (e.g., ethnicity, race, or nationality) (Harrison et al., 1998), organisational members might be more prone to consider the advantages of diverse perspectives on creativity, which could lead to more profound interactions, dedicating more effort to describing ideas, actively listening, and providing constructive feedback – more effective communication within multicultural teams (Daft et al., 1983).

3. Methodology

3.1. Qualitative methodological approach

A qualitative methodological approach was adopted, this is a type of research that does not derive from statistical methods or other forms of quantification; it encompasses inquiries into individuals' lives, experiences, behaviours, examinations of organisational dynamics, and international interactions (Strauss et al., 1990). According to Bryman (2016), qualitative research questions concentrate on comprehending and explaining the socially constructed world around us.

A qualitative research approach was used to achieve a comprehensive understanding of this specific subject; this method allows for an in-depth exploration of the topics at hand, providing rich insights that are not easily captured in quantitative means (Bădilă et al., 2020). Furthermore, this form of research serves as a wide category that includes various interpretive techniques to describe, elucidate, and interpret – rather than find the frequency, it helps understand the meaning of different phenomena in society (Van Maanen, 1979). Qualitative techniques are valuable for identifying psychological and sociocultural factors that are challenging to portray through quantitative research practices (Park et al., 2024).

This methodology has important benefits such as (1) it generates detailed descriptions of participants' emotions, viewpoints, and lived experiences, while also interpreting the significance behind their behaviours (Denzin, 1989), (2) it comprehends the human experience within particular contexts (Rahman, 2016), (3) it is well-suited for offering factual and descriptive insights (Johnson et al., 2012), and (4) offers an efficiency of results and a high degree of accurateness of the information gathered (Bădilă et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this method is not entirely devoid of limitations; the conclusions from a qualitative method might be deemed as having low credibility by

policymakers (Rahman, 2016) and the results cannot be generalised to the whole population (Harry et al., 2014).

3.2. Sample and data collection

According to Creswell (2013, p. 97), case study research is “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection”.

In this research, the multiple case study was chosen to be able to draw comparisons between different and individual cases, encapsulating a range of characteristics and extremes to achieve in-depth understanding and it facilitates the examination of a comprehensive phenomenon while preserving the unique attributes of each case study (Adams et al., 2022). Through meticulous selection and meticulously produced, scholars have the opportunity to use multiple case studies as a means to foster the external validity and generalisability of conclusions from individual case analyses (Merriam, 1998).

Case studies are generally categorised as descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory (Dubé et al., 2003). The explanatory case approach offers comprehensive explanations of the cases examined (Tarjiah et al., 2023). The current research is classified as explanatory since it is focused on understanding “how” and “why” (Yin, 2008) intercultural communication influences organisational creativity, analysing causal relationships, and testing hypotheses regarding these connections, by investigating specific evidence and experiences.

This study was initiated by using secondary sources, which were documentary observations through previously published books, articles, papers, reports, journals, and relevant studies on the matter under analysis to increase knowledge in the area (Turabian et al., 2018). Then, the interview method of the primary source was employed. Primary sources generally encompass data that the researcher gathers firsthand in the real world, possessing an original and organic nature, and can be achieved through different methods such as interviews, questionnaires, and observations; interviews typically involve an exchange between two individuals, one assuming the role of the interviewer and the other the interviewee (Mazhar, 2021).

The three common types of interviews include structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews where the main difference is based on the degree of the interviewer’s responsibility (Adhabi et al., 2017). The semi-structured interview model was chosen because, although it is guided by a predetermined set of topics or a framework of themes to explore, it provides flexibility, which enables the interviewer to delve deeply into a subject and introduce new questions based on the interviewee's responses or ask enhanced questions than the initially drafted ones (Ruslin et al., 2022).

The study involved five companies from diverse business sectors, each of which employs workers with different cultural backgrounds. The interviewees expressed interest in collaborating and found the study subject interesting and significant in today's business landscape. Due to geographical differences, the interviews were carried out predominantly online through videoconferencing, using Zoom or Microsoft Teams platforms, except for one face-to-face interview. The data was collected between May, 6th to 16th, 2024 and the duration of the interviews ranged from twenty minutes to one hour.

Upon the completion of the interviews, it became imperative to process and analyze the gathered data. To achieve this, the transcription of all five interviews was executed. Fundamentally, transcription entails converting recorded audio into a written format suitable for the analysis of a specific event and this method is crucial to finding properties and frequent patterns that one could potentially overlook with other observational techniques (Duranti, 2006). The transcription of the interviews was facilitated through the utilisation of software to accelerate the process since it is a particularly time-consuming procedure (McMullin, 2023) and allows effective management of qualitative data (McLellan et al., 2003).

The last phase comprises data analysis, a pivotal aspect of research that enhances the effectiveness of the study's outcomes (Alem, 2020). Thereupon an overview and examination of each case study was performed. Following this, the data was presented, establishing connections between the cases. To improve the validity of the findings related to the identified concern, they were linked with the findings of other researchers whose projects address similar subjects.

3.3. Selection of the participants

The participants in this study were chosen using purposive sampling to better align the sample with the aims and goals of the research, thereby strengthening the reliability and authenticity of the collected data and the findings (Campbell et al., 2020). The selection process was centred on identifying companies with a diverse workforce comprised of employees from various nationalities, as this was considered the most pertinent and exclusive condition. To identify suitable organisations, an initial search was done targeting companies known for their multicultural employee base and it the goal was also to encompass a diverse range of business sectors. This involved analysing and searching for company websites, industry publications such as articles, and diversity rankings.

After identifying potentially valuable companies for the research, it was carefully considered selection criteria for participants to ensure the provision of significant observations: (1) participants were required to be managers in companies with diverse nationalities among their employees, (2) they should be in managerial or supervisory roles as they are more likely to have better insights into

the dynamics of multicultural teams, and (3) efforts were made to include participants of varying ages and genders to capture distinct perspectives.

Therefore, five companies were selected for this study, and they were briefly characterised and the managers' positions interviewed were identified (Table 1).

Table 1. Companies description and interviewees identification

Company	Description	Interviewee
X1	X1 is a communication agency that was founded in 2000 and previously named AAA, thus dropping the first and last letters of the brand after fourteen years. Over the years, it acquired other companies to build its structure. They began with the digital aspect of websites, expanding into communication and branding. The company initially focused on enhancing the Customer Experience by adopting an integrated approach to client management. Then, they transitioned to a Business-to-experience model, aiming to provide a comprehensive experience for all stakeholders. This entails not only improving communication for clients but also engaging with the entire business community. At the moment, they are the largest independent agency in Portugal, with seven offices, the X1's headquarters is in Oliveis de Azeméis, Aveiro. The team comprises about 195 employees, having around five nationalities: Portuguese, Brazilian, Italian, Spanish, and Greek. The team involves marketers, communicators, designers, and engineers.	I1 - Chief Marketing Officer
X2	X2, founded in 2006, is a French corporate and investment bank that belongs to the Groupe BBB and offers support in investment strategies, corporate finance, funding solutions, and market transactions to a diverse client base including businesses, financial entities, investment partners, and governmental bodies across the globe. In other words, X2 helps institutional investors, organisations, and individuals build their investment portfolios by offering them a range of solutions. Even though X2 in Portugal was founded in 2016, it only started operating officially in 2017. Located in Campo 24 de Agosto in Porto, the company is a Centre of Expertise that works for the entire BBB Groupe, France's second-largest bank group. It applies technology for the development of financial expertise in its two global business lines – Corporate and Investment Banking, and Asset and Wealth Management. Their core business area in Portugal is to recruit the best talent and is one of the highest investments in Human Resources made by the Groupe BBB. X2 Portugal has 2,400 employees from 37 different nationalities, including Portuguese, Brazilian, French, Tunisian, Moroccan, Indian, and British. The employees are organised into three main departments: Information Technology, Banking Support Activities, and Compliance.	I2 - Head of Communication and Sustainability
X3	The X3 Group, established in 1988, is a prominent French multinational company specialising in engineering and IT consulting services. As one of the global market leaders, X3 has solidified its position in the industry over the years. The company operates in a diverse range of sectors including Aeronautics & Space, Defense & Naval, Security, Automotive, Rail, Energy, Life Sciences, Finance, Retail, Telecommunications, and Services. With a presence in 30 countries crossing Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, the company has a global workforce of around 57,000 employees worldwide. In 2023, the company achieved a substantial financial turnover, surpassing 4 billion euros. X3 IBERIA was established in Spain in 2000 as a start-up in the field of engineering, and the inauguration of the Lisbon office was in 2017. Currently, provides engineering, IT, and consulting services to important companies in both Spain and Portugal. X3 Portugal generated 12,4 million euros of revenue in 2023 and has one office in Lisbon and Porto. The X3 Group in Portugal has about 1, 200 people and the X3 entity itself has about 250 employees with different nationalities such as Portuguese, Brazilian, Indian, Italian, and German. Nevertheless, in their daily routine, they have contact and collaborate with employees from different countries such as Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, and so on.	I3 - Coach business manager
X4	Founded in 1857, X4 is a leading retail and commercial bank headquartered in Spain. Since January 2024, it has been structured into five global businesses: Retail & Commercial Banking, Digital Consumer Bank, CIB, Wealth, and Payments,	I4 - IT area manager

	giving rise to “One Santander” - a more efficient operating model that enables them to join the potential of their local and global markets to grow profitably and enhance customer service. Therefore, it nurtures relationships between the company’s subsidiaries and regions by sharing strengths, technology, and commercial know-how. The X4 Group operates commercial banks in 15 countries: Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Germany, Mexico, Poland, Peru, Uruguay, the USA, the UK, China, and Morocco. It also supports customers with international establishments and investments in over 30 countries through its extensive global banking network. In 2023, the X4 Group employed 212,764 people, served over 164 million customers, and had 4 million shareholders worldwide. In Portugal, X4 serves 1.8 million clients with approximately 5,000 employees, comprising Portuguese, Spanish, and Brazilian, and frequently collaborates with Mexico and other countries.	
X5	X5 is a Portuguese company that operates nationwide in the real estate and accommodation sectors. Founded in June 2011, it is located on Rua do Bonjardim in Porto and offers a comprehensive range of services in its sector. In addition to the sale and rental of properties, it specialises in urban renovation and rehabilitation, appraisal, consulting, architecture, engineering, decoration, and energy certification. It also provides support with bureaucratic and legal issues related to these processes. The firm is particularly renowned for short-term rentals, catering to the tourist, corporate, and student markets. It offers personalised services tailored to the specific needs and business visions of each client. Additionally, X5 provides a dedicated service for real estate investors, aiming to maximise investment returns with minimal risk. X5 distinguishes itself by offering a wide range of complementary services, from market studies to communication and marketing plans, to make the real estate business more solid and robust. The company has around nine employees, with five working in local accommodation and the remaining staff distributed between architecture and engineering. The majority are Portuguese, with additional nationalities including Brazilian and São Tomé and Príncipe.	I5 – Head of Human Resources Department

Source: Own elaboration.

3.4. Instrument guide

The questions (Q) addressed in the interview guide were created based on this study’s literature review (Table 2). The interview guide consisted of twelve questions categorised into four sections: sociodemographic characterisation, awareness and practices, intercultural communication and creativity relationship, and benefits and challenges.

The Sociodemographic Characterization consisted of three questions (Q1, Q2 and Q3) to obtain information about the company and the interviewee’s position. The Awareness and Practices section, with two questions (Q4 and Q5), comprising two questions, sought to gather information on the company’s perspective and prioritisation of intercultural communication, as well as to comprehend the practices and metrics related to intercultural communication and creativity.

The Intercultural Communication and Creativity Relationship, with five questions, was considered extremely significant as it concerned the main topic of the thesis. Q6 aimed to identify any concrete evidence within the company that shows a link between effective intercultural communication and increased creativity levels. Q7 investigated whether intercultural communication has facilitated or complicated the creative process in teams. Q8 explored if creativity is used to solve communication problems and if intercultural communication encourages new ideas. Q9 examined whether ideas from multicultural teams have contributed to business development and company

success. Q10 identified the most important role of intercultural communication in promoting organisational creativity according to the interviewee's perspective. The last category, with two questions (Q11 and Q12), Benefits and Challenges, aimed to understand the benefits of intercultural communication within the company and the major obstacles the organisation has encountered in promoting effective intercultural communication.

Before starting each interview, participants were provided with an overview of the research. They were informed on the subject matter and its purpose and they were given background information on intercultural communication concept. Any questions were addressed at this time. The interview was conducted equally for all interviewees as they were provided with the interview guide before the interview.

Table 2. Categories, interview guide questions and authors

Category	Questions	Authors
1 - Sociodemographic characterisation	Q1, Q2, Q3	--
2 - Awareness and practices	Q4	Shadid (2022)
	Q5	Kaplan (1960)
3 - Intercultural communication and creativity relationship	Q6	Lombardo et al. (2011)
	Q7	Crisp et al. (2012)
	Q8	Braslauskas (2021)
	Q9	Jones et al. (2020)
	Q10	Thida (2019); Zeng et al. (2011)
4 - Benefits and challenges	Q11	Phillips et al. /2015)
	Q12	Chen et al. (2017)

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Results

4.1. Enhancement of creativity and innovation

The interviewees highlight a clear pattern: intercultural communication significantly enhances organisational creativity. Participants provided compelling insights into how the diverse cultural backgrounds of their colleagues contribute to creative processes within their teams.

Interview (I1) - Q6: “Well, I feel that creativity is better served... I have a very positive view of Candela, my colleague who is Spanish, who gives incredible inputs in communication, really solid suggestions... Pietro, for instance, who is Italian, gives amazing suggestions in the European projects we develop... so it brings greater diversity even in ideas, it brings a perspective, a different point of view about what we think... the inputs they give are brutal for our creativity in general.”/ Q7: “When we’re talking about pure and hard creative processes, it's very, very positive, really very positive.”

Interview 2 (I2) - Q7: “...Our teams being multicultural already bring a different perspective compared to working solely with Portuguese teams... the more knowledge and perspectives one has, the more creative and enriched the teamwork and daily interactions become, resulting in a healthier and more creative work environment.”

Interview 3 (I3) - Q6: “So, we touch the point in a different way. It’s also interesting because it's also a way to create a new discussion, a new way of thinking, and for sure new creativity.”/ Q9: “So, this kind of creativity, this kind of solution, is helping us a lot in getting business in Portugal...”.

4.2. Intercultural communication: Impact on business growth and performance

Insights reveal how their multicultural teams are actively generating new business ideas and solutions, contributing significantly to the company’s growth. By leveraging the diverse perspectives and experiences of their employees, organisations were able to innovate more effectively.

I1 - Q9: “...no doubt these colleagues give many, many contributions, many letters, to the success of ideas and the materialisation of business, no doubt. I can say that two or three colleagues are responsible for us having grown in these business areas that brought very disruptive views, in how they created ideas for a project application, in how they materialised some suggestions, so they are indeed very, very valuable people, especially in more global European contexts.” / Q11: “Honestly, and I imagine what X1 would be like without these colleagues, right? Who has this vision and, for sure, it would be much poorer in terms of thought dynamics and the world.”

I2 - Q9: “...I believe a major source of this diversity of ideas and inputs is indeed to multiculturalism. So, honestly, I would find it hard to believe that if we, as of today, had a team that was purely national, purely Portuguese, I can't imagine that we would have come so far in many of the projects that we ended up embracing or proposing to the headquarters, for example.” / Q10: “Well, the most important role, if I have to choose and perhaps take an angle here, I think multiculturalism teaches us to look at the same theme, the same problem, the same idea, initiative, I think multiculturalism helps us to look at things from different perspectives. And that is a very important source of creativity, isn't it?”/ Q11: “We believe that having diverse teams effectively contributes to the results and performance of the company.”

I3 - Q11: “What is important for us is generating more business because we are a consultancy company and basically our goal is to every year grow and get more business, okay? This intercultural communication is helping in obtaining this because these synergies these creations made by the international team are helping every country in creating new business... So, all these international teams, in the end, are creating and this is the new strategy of X3 and if you see X3 and the competition, you can see that X3 is the company that is going more per year in terms of percentage, and I think that this new strategy that was implemented is the key factor because also the customer appreciates.”.

4.3. Benefits and obstacles

Managers point out some benefits that are observed when culturally diverse teams communicate effectively. These benefits include the ability to share solutions and even communicate

with colleagues from other parts of the multinational organisation who already have the experience and expertise. This collaborative approach enriches problem-solving and enhances daily operations.

I3 - Q12: “So, imagine, to maybe expand to a consultant, to an employee that since he came from Iran he cannot be involved in this project because they took Iran is considered a country risky for different entities and so basically the law or internal regulations say that “You cannot work in a project that involves military”, and maybe the dream of this person is to work in aerospace and security and he moved to Italy or he moved to another country and he cannot achieve his dreams.”

I4 - Q11: “The ability to solve problems, share solutions, not having to start from scratch, having economic advantages, having cultural advantages, the advantages of your daily life to be able to share and speak with other people who have had the same problems elsewhere.” / Q7: “If we start analysing what has been done in each geography and start questioning all geographies about what has been done, sometimes we might waste quite a bit of time. If it's not something well localised and well thought out, we can get lost in meetings and analysis. Sometimes we can't reach the goal.” / Q12: “I think the obstacles always have a lot to do with each person and each team's openness to being receptive to sharing knowledge between different teams, between different countries, and people embracing this mindset of sharing.”.

4.4. Enriches the company's culture and improves internal communication

Managers highlight that interactions among team members from diverse backgrounds create an energetic workplace environment and enrich their organisational culture. Employees with varied cultural insights bring unique communication styles and approaches to the table, enabling more effective interactions. Intercultural communication was found to enrich organisation dynamics by fostering a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect. They reflect that these colleagues in the company tend to help in problem-solving and adopt a more pragmatic approach to challenges. Their pragmatic mindset enhances the overall problem-solving capabilities of the organisation.

I1 - Q5: “...we genuinely feel they add a lot to the team and everything they share from their experiences... Even in terms of respecting each other, isn't it? In how we listen to each other, you know, in how we manage ourselves when working as a team... We know they have a very natural sympathy... because they do indeed have this background and it enriches the culture of a company a lot.” / Q6: “...all the communication within X1, we collect a lot of inputs from colleagues... So, the fact that these people have different experiences brings a great complement to our vision...” / Q8: “...colleagues are very practical. They have a very pragmatic view of things... And all the colleagues we coexist with, who are from other cultures, tend to be extremely pragmatic and super simplified in things... So, everything related to communication with different backgrounds and cultures helps enrich our communication and can often be a problem solver... I think it can tend to be more pragmatic

in solving situations.” / Q11: “The fact that all the experiences they share with us are different and are things we wouldn't imagine, right? We never thought about this, right? Maybe working in the backgrounds, they worked in, the structure, the very structure of the companies, the lifestyle, so all of this helps us have a dynamic look... You feel much more excited to work with someone who has a completely different vision... So, it's much richer, much more dynamic, right?”

I2 - Q11: “I think we end up having a multitude of views and ways of seeing the world that enriches our way of working, the way we look at processes, the agility of the company itself.”

I5 - Q6: “...they come from countries with a lighter, more flexible and transparent mentality towards life, work, and problem-solving normally. So, what I feel in both, which has a lot to do with culture, is a simplification regarding some issues or conflicts...” / Q7: “...there is a great frankness in what she thinks things should be done or gives ideas, but that also has to do with Brazilian culture itself, right? They are usually very proactive and communicative when something needs to be done...

A: So, perhaps in that sense, they help, perhaps in communication processes and problem-solving at the company. I_5: Yes, yes.”.

4.5. Cultural diversity simplifies work processes

Interviewees indicate how colleagues from diverse backgrounds tend to simplify processes and tasks in the company, eventually contributing to a more efficient and simpler work environment.

I1 - Q8: “... And all the colleagues we coexist with, who are from other cultures, tend to be extremely pragmatic and super simplified in things.” / Q9 “... So, I've been there, I've been through this” and they help simplify things, no doubt.”

I5 - Q6: “...So, what I feel in both, which has a lot to do with culture, is a simplification regarding some processes...” / Q7: “...it's a bit of the simplicity of things, "look, maybe it's not so complicated to do it this way, let's do it simpler" and we all look at each other and, yes, we really see that we are complicating things here.”

I1 - Q7: “I would say that there can only really be, there are just a few barriers to some understanding, but it's interpersonal. Imagine, I don't know, that communication we do more by chat, right? That can lead to some misunderstandings here... But these are natural barriers, right?” / Q12: “...there will obviously be many obstacles, some issues even more about how we live and socialise with each other, right? It's about the social part, even the background part. For example, I don't know, the Greeks are maybe a little serious in approaching some things, they are a little more sensitive to the tone. So, we need to be sensitive here.”

I2 - Q12: “...The experience, the worldview are different, and sometimes there are situations where there might be some collision or sensitivity in interpreting messages, this can happen... We are

getting a little better at dealing with these sensitivities, but there are always interpretations and possibilities that can arise that we can never predict.”.

4.6. Companies initiatives

This segment provides an overview of the initiatives discussed in the interviews, which the companies have implemented to promote intercultural communication and organisational creativity. It also outlines the methods that the companies use to evaluate these initiatives, demonstrating a proactive approach to assessing their overall impact on the employees and the organisation (Table 3).

Table 1. Initiatives and evaluation methods implemented by the companies to promote intercultural communication and organizational creativity

Company	Initiatives	Evaluation Methods
X1	X1 Summit: It happens every year and unites all employees with the main aim of sharing.	All of the initiatives are evaluated with questionnaires.
	The Office Days: It happens once a month or less, they invite employees who usually go to that office, to come and work for that day without meetings. It is a day of more socialising where there are shares and more interpersonal relationships.	
	Spread the Move (STM): It is a moment where a colleague shares information and gives training to the colleagues about something that it considers useful. The main goal is to develop their leadership and communication abilities. Once a month there is a general STM, and every 15 days there is an STM in teams where the share is done with the people of the team and it is always on Fridays.	
	X1 Talks: A cross-company theme is presented where any colleague can contribute with their ideas. Those who identify with the topic or those who believe they have good input to share participate. It is an informal environment in which there are employees from different functions and areas and the participation is voluntary. There is a moderator with guidelines to guide the discussion. They have more than an hour and a half to discuss the topic without rushing and avoid hasty conclusions.	
	Informal Moments: Even though these are not official moments, employees sometimes bring some traditions to the company by sharing some moments and stories about their culture. Moreover, they also sometimes bring some dishes that are from their cultural gastronomy.	
X2	Training Sessions: In the onboarding process, the employees receive training related to multiculturalism.	The Learning and Development team within the Human Resources department evaluates it based on participant numbers and collects feedback on the content delivered and other aspects.
	Training on Diversity, Equity, and Multiculturalism: Specific training for managers and all the staff is occurring (at least until the day of the interview) focusing on diversity, equity, and multiculturalism.	
	International Community: It has the purpose of bringing together a group of employees to support the integration of new colleagues. This community emerged quite spontaneously and has been utilised by the company, from a communication standpoint, to activate numerous celebratory dates and communication plans throughout the year. It has various formats such as podcasts, events, talks, and sharing experiences and testimonials on its social media platforms to promote multiculturalism.	--
	Integration of non-Portuguese Nationals: The HR department also has a specific area dedicated to supporting the integration	--

	of non-Portuguese nationals. It includes helping in legal and administrative matters, terms of handling tax-related issues and assisting in finding accommodation.	
	Survey about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Every two years, there is a survey to all employees answer about this matter.	--
X3	Amplify: This event has a duration of four days and it happens every time there is a new role. It's an international event between managers of different countries, where they share, and speak about a problem and how that is managed in every country. These events are organized during the year with different levels of people.	--
	Women in X3: The organisation has created communication about the women in X3, where they transmit all the responsibilities, roles, and stories of women from different countries enhancing their importance in the Group.	--
X4	Employee Satisfaction: It is applied in the company two or three times a year when there are some questions related to communication and cultural diversity.	--
	Exchange Initiatives: The employee can choose to do an exchange and work for six months in another country where the Group is established. This promotes Intercultural Communication across their businesses.	--
X5	Monthly Breakfast: The company has a moment that happens once a month that gives employees leisure moments together. In this way, they can be more relaxed with each other and have sharing moments.	--

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion

The findings show that multicultural teams play a crucial part in driving business growth and enhancing performance. They do not only bring creative ideas to the workplace but also transform them into tangible business projects and strategies. It is also emphasised the significance of team diversity for the advancement of science, technology, and innovation (Jones et al., 2020). Having employees from mixed cultures is beneficial for organisations aiming to establish a presence in international markets and IC helps companies effectively engage with clients from various nationalities, indicating that organisations have a key advantage in this area when they have cultural diversity among their employees. Washington et al. (2012) underscored that the absence of intercultural skills can lead to the failure of international business endeavours, highlighting the necessity of these skills for global success. Furthermore, Chaney et al. (2007) and Cardon et al. (2003) point out that understanding the customs is essential for avoiding misunderstandings and ensuring effective global operations. Thus, P1 is supported.

The data revealed that intercultural communication is a significant factor in enriching the culture of organisations and improving internal communication. It is enhanced how interactions among culturally diverse teams fostered a more inclusive and respectful workplace environment. This enrichment occurs through several mechanisms such as employees from diverse cultural backgrounds bringing their perspectives, experiences, values, and communication styles to the work environment (Mannix et al., 2005; Stevens et al., 2008). Furthermore, it reveals that these employees value

transparent and honest communication, which contributes to effective problem-solving and conflict resolution. There is an inclination towards simplification observed among colleagues from diverse backgrounds. This tendency can bring organisational benefits such as reducing unnecessary complexity and improving the overall efficiency of tasks. Consequently, companies save time and resources, which they can use more effectively to address critical needs. Cross-cultural communication requires sensitivity and understanding to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. Findings revealed that communicating and interpreting messages across different cultural backgrounds can be challenging due to their differences. Shadid (2022) mentions intercultural communication difficulties include verbal and nonverbal communication discrepancies. Although currently there is a research lack addressing the relationship between intercultural communication and company culture and also cultural diversity and the simplification of processes in organisational settings; this is consistent with the idea that intercultural communication improves decision-making and problem-solving skills (Žegunienė, 2021). Therefore, P2 is partially supported.

Data confirm that colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds contribute to creative processes within their teams. This aligns with literature that suggests diverse teams are more innovative and creative due to the integration of varied perceptions, wisdom, skills, and capabilities (Phillips et al., 2015; West, 2002). It is also quite connected to the findings of Stahl et al. (2010) who indicated that cultural diversity in teams led to significant process gains through enriched creativity. Thus, P3 is supported.

The initiatives implemented by the companies highlight strategic efforts in promoting intercultural communication and creativity. There is a significant variation in their approach and scope. Some initiatives are wide-ranging, focusing not only on integrating employees from different nationalities into the organisation's environment but also on providing extensive training for managers and employees on diversity, equity, and multiculturalism. They also support the integration of non-Portuguese nationals into the country, something that is not common for an organisation to do but it is extremely positive. Other initiatives foster a natural and non-invasive way for employees to learn from each other and they nurture creativity and employee integration, giving equal importance to everyone. Despite these efforts made by the companies, there remains a gap in fully promoting intercultural communication and organisational creativity. Nevertheless, these initiatives provide valuable lessons and convey a commitment to growing towards a more inclusive and creative work environment. Thus, P4 is supported.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Final remarks

This study aimed to explore the impact of IC on OC and has conceded significant insights, successfully reaching the research objectives and answering the research propositions. Intercultural communication plays a crucial role in driving organisational creativity, fostering innovation, and contributing to overall company success. Its main conclusions are as follows:

(1) Intercultural communication significantly contributes to creativity and innovation within organisations. Diverse teams are more likely to generate innovative ideas due to their varied perspectives and experiences than teams that only include national employees;

(2) Multicultural teams contribute to business growth and performance by converting ideas into actual projects;

(3) Employees of different nationalities help organisations effectively communicate with international clients and understand their cultures, which is important for establishing an international presence;

(4) Interaction among employees of different backgrounds enriches organisational culture, as they bring unique communication styles and approaches, fostering inclusivity and mutual respect. They improve problem-solving abilities and implement a more pragmatic approach to challenges;

(5) Culturally diverse employees tend to simplify processes and tasks in the company, thus contributing to a more efficient and effective work environment;

(6) Challenges regarding interpretation might appear when employees with this kind of diversity are communicating, thus sensitivity in communication is required;

(7) Not having this cultural environment in organisations may lead to poorer creativity and less innovative projects;

(8) Intercultural communication can foster social awareness within the workplace and contribute to a more inclusive world; and

(9) There are potential legal and regulatory constraints that might affect certain projects and employee participation, depending on their specific nature.

The findings demonstrate that diverse cultural perspectives within teams lead to enriched problem-solving abilities, improved internal communication, enriched company culture, and tended to simplify work processes. Additionally, it was noted that organisations gain a stronger international presence because multicultural teams help them understand and engage with diverse client bases. This study effectively addressed the gap in the literature by investigating the relationship between intercultural communication and its impact on organisational creativity. It suggested that prioritising effective intercultural communication can give companies significant competitive advantages. This

research offers a strong foundation for companies seeking to employ cultural diversity to elevate their performance and global success.

It shows that intercultural communication is fundamental in fostering organisational creativity and innovation. Embracing and promoting intercultural communication is not just a pathway to diversity and inclusion, but also a key tactic for driving organisational creativity and remaining competitive in today's global business scenery.

6.2. Theoretical and practical implications

From a theoretical perspective, the study reinforces and extends existing assumptions and research on cultural diversity and creativity by showing that effective intercultural communication is a key driver of creative outputs within organisations. The findings also suggest that culturally diverse teams tend to simplify organisational processes and can introduce a new dimension to this theory, suggesting that low-context communication styles can also lead to simpler and more efficient organisational methods. Moreover, the research also demonstrates the role of intercultural communication and cultural diversity in enriching company culture and improving internal communication. This contribution adds a new layer to existing organisational culture theories.

From a practical perspective, organisations should actively promote intercultural communication to use the creative potential of diverse teams since it can foster an environment where exceptional insights and solutions flourish, driving innovation as a competitive advantage. Additionally, multicultural teams bring ideas that might be transformed into tangible business projects, improving business growth and performance. Having these teams, companies can improve their relationship with international clients, understand different cultural contexts, and avoid misunderstandings in external communication. This ability is especially advantageous for businesses that aim to successfully establish global operations and nurture international communication. Organisations that have cultural diversity among their employees may also benefit from reduced complexity and improved efficiency, saving time and resources that can be redirected to crucial needs.

However, all of these benefits are only possible if organisations develop more inclusive environments, including training focused on improving communication among employees and programs focused on diversity and multiculturalism to avoid discrimination and accurate tracking should also be applied. Also, companies must be aware of legal and regulatory challenges that may affect employee participation in specific projects.

6.3. Limitations

It is crucial to take into account the potential limitations associated with the qualitative research approach used in this study. Even though the qualitative approach provides in-depth

comprehension of individual perceptions, the findings might not be easily generalised beyond the specific organisations and cultural contexts studied because they might not be applicable and appropriate to all circumstances. The interviews made were with a small and limited number of organisations, so it can be said that the sample size is the main limitation.

In qualitative research, it is important to recognise that the researcher's background and theoretical perspectives can influence data interpretation, potentially shaping the analysis and understanding of data. This risk highlights the necessity for careful consideration and awareness of potential biases during the research process. Moreover, this research may not definitively prove that changes in one variable directly influence changes in another as there may be other unmeasured factors affecting both intercultural communication and creativity.

6.4. Future research directions

To overcome the constraints recognised in the study and to progress our comprehension of this matter, future research directions should incorporate different strategies and areas. Future studies shall include a larger and more diverse sample of organisations across different geographic locations and cultural contexts. As a result, this would improve the generalisability and give a more ample perception of how intercultural communication influences organisational creativity in diverse situations. Furthermore, applying an observation approach could also be important to reduce the risk of biased data and to have a richer understanding. Quantitative methods could complement qualitative findings and provide statistical evidence of the relationship. This would help establish more definitive causal links and address the limitations related to non-generalisability.

Future quantitative research should integrate all employees of the organisations studied to have a more representative understanding of the dynamics between these two variables. It could also be important to compare a multicultural team with a monocultural team to see the differences in creativity and behaviour. Another strategy would be performing longitudinal studies to observe changes over time and understand the long-term impact of intercultural communication on organisational creativity. The findings also indicated that IC impacts more areas than creativity, future studies should focus on how it affects other organisational areas. In addition, it should be explored other factors that influence the relationship between these two variables, such as employee motivation and management practices.

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